



## FRYEBURG FAIR'S OXEN COUPLE - STEVE NORTON & PAULE COTE

At Fryeburg Fair we have two departments for oxen - Pulling Oxen and Show Steers & Oxen. For those confused about what an oxen or steer is - here you go: A female cow is a heifer. They show in the Dairy Department. A male cow is a bull. When a bull is castrated it becomes a steer. At four years old it becomes an ox. Two or more are oxen. Farms keep a few bulls for breeding. Otherwise too many bulls can be difficult to handle. Castration totally calms down a bull's disposition because testosterone is removed. So oxen are an all-male department at Fryeburg Fair! Breeds of oxen include Brown Swiss, Jerseys, Holsteins, Shorthorns, Devon, Guernsey, Lineback and some crossbreeds.

Steve Norton & Paule (pronounced Paul) Cote are the Superintendents of the Show Steers & Oxen Department at Fryeburg Fair. There's a lot of organization involved in this department and many details to tend before the Fair's opening day each year. Norton & Cote are masterful organizers and leaders. They have been heading this department for 15 years.



*Steve Norton, Superintendent of Show Steers & Oxen at Fryeburg Fair with Assistant Superintendent Paule Cote*



*Fryeburg Fair Show Steers & Oxen - Jake Cash is from Poland, Maine. He raises shorthorns but has owned various breeds as well. He is the Superintendent of 4H Working Steers at Fryeburg Fair. Norton says, "Jake Cash is an expert at showing cattle and he's very meticulous and particular about his herd."*

Norton grew up on Oaklawn Farm, a dairy farm in Albion, Maine, with holsteins and jerseys. His hometown fair was Windsor Fair where he participated in 4H with his twin Jersey heifers, Lucy Locket and Little Lulu. Norton says, "Daily chores were the priority in all our lives. Chores always needed to be done and, as a youngster, it was a big responsibility caring for the lives of animals." Because of these fond memories and early lessons, Norton would gravitate back to his cattle and farming roots in later years by getting involved with agricultural fairs in Maine. Cote was born in Fort Kent. Her connection to farming and oxen has been through her relationship with Steve. She's taken to it all like a pro.

Norton and Cote met through mutual friends 32 years ago. They live in Windham, ME, and have a shared property on Sebago Lake. Norton has three children and two granddaughters. His career was in home building and he specialized in interior finish and trim. His most recent big project was building his son's home. Cote retired in 2015 after 44 years in information technology at Maine Med. As well as her full-time work, she has been an energetic and creative entrepreneur all her life. She owned and operated a company that sold catamarans and pontoon boats and started a chil-

dren's clothing company called Guppies. She has been a custom painter of canvas pieces for floors and sailboats. "I can multi-task and I like to stay busy," she says. Norton & Cote both volunteer at Common Ground Fair and Waterford Fair. Norton has been the Oxen Coordinator at Common Ground for 20 years.

On the topic of Fryeburg Fair, Norton says, "We have 700 classes of show steer & oxen and judging and competitions within every breed and crossbreed all based on weights. The handler - man, woman or child - is called a teamster. Judges will critique the oxen and their teamster on control, handiness, smoothness, training and their use of voice commands. No sticks. The goad stick is used to gain the oxen's attention and is used to strike the yoke not the animal. You can usually tell immediately how much time a teamster has spent working with their pair."

"There's a lot of paperwork and organization," adds Cote. "After the entries come in, we assign stalling in one of four barns. In 2019 we had 114 pair competing. I'm much more comfortable with these massive horned animals than I used to be. One time one of them ran up behind me and I jumped up on a fence and was hanging on a light pole until the owner came along."

Norton recommends attending the demonstrations on Monday and the scooting contests. "Scooting is taking a pair of steers and they are hooked to a wood scoot, a sled of sorts, and then they negotiate an obstacle course similar to what they would do in the woods to clear land and bring out logs. Winners are the oxen that score closest to zero as they receive points if they hit something. This really shows how much effort the teamster has put in and demonstrates how well the three of them communicate."

For the last four years, Norton & Cote have managed to bring all the pulling and show oxen together for a group photo on the Wednesday of Fryeburg Fair at 4 p.m. in an attempt to gain the world's record for the largest number of yoked oxen in one place. Cote is working on communicating with the Guinness Book of World Records to make it official.

Norton says, "Families come back year after year. It's generational and for them it's often their vacation time. A lot of them have farmed enough to sustain their passion for keeping steers. It's their vocation and hobby. They pick four or five fairs on the circuit to attend. Our show steer & oxen people come in and stay Sunday to Sunday while pulling oxen go in and out of the Fair during the week. We have lots of socializing, partying and 'talking oxen' at Fryeburg Fair. We have line dancing, a pizza party, barbecue and pot-luck dinner. It helps breed fellowship in our oxen community. I really like the fact that tradition continues with young people following their parents' and grandparents' heritage. It builds lots of self-confidence in kids and teaches responsibility."



*Fryeburg Fair Show Steers & Oxen - Mark Winslow of Falmouth, Maine, raises Devons & Holsteins - in photo with some of his many awards. He is the past leader of Brass Knobs 4H Club which his father established. Brass Knobs 4H is over 50 years old. Norton says, "Mark is held in the highest esteem by teamsters, to the point that if they felt they could beat Mark they had a pretty good pair of cattle!"*



*Fryeburg Fair Show Steers & Oxen - the late Lincoln Orff (Dec. 06/21/2021) with his daughters Claudia & Claudine of River Valley Farm in Jefferson, Maine. Steve Norton says, "Lincoln was the gold standard of teamsters. His steers were top quality and everyone looked to him as being the best."*

Norton is proud to say, "Oxen built this country. We all get very attached to these animals. They are incredibly strong and have great and calm personalities. They are the original loggers. They have tilled the soil and cleared the land since the beginning."

For more information on the Fair's Show Steers & Oxen Department go to [www.fryeburgfair.org](http://www.fryeburgfair.org).

by Rachel Andrews Damon, Fryeburg Fair Publicity & Advertising